

ANTI-COLONIALISM IN AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY

Realpolitik and Illusion

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THE foreign policy of the United States in the last few years has obviously been affected by the belief that it is possible to acquire the support in the struggle against Communism of newly independent states in Asia and Africa, or of peoples likely soon to be independent, provided always that the United States takes care to dissociate herself from her partners in the Western alliance who are still committed to maintaining imperial positions overseas, or who are tainted in the minds of their previous subjects by what the latter now regard as a record of domination or exploitation. The Suez affair showed that the United States was prepared to go so far in this direction as actively to range herself against her principal Western allies—Britain and France—on an issue which found the latter in conflict with most of these new nations.

Insofar as this American position is a deliberate corollary of the general attitude adopted by the United States toward the problems of foreign policy now confronting her, it is understandable enough. Having first insisted, in the flush of enthusiasm over the Korean intervention, upon inflating the role of the General Assembly of the United Nations, and having then made the subordination of her policies to the decisions of that body a proclaimed principle of action, the United States was bound to take account of the increasing numerical weight of the Afro-Asian bloc within it. And even

when acting outside the United Nations, as in the case of the "Eisenhower Doctrine," it was understandable that once the winning over of "neutralist sympathies" was deemed essential, care should be taken to give to the countries in question a view of the United States which it was felt would tally with their prejudices. It was the same kind of calculation that led to the United States' acquiescing in Saudi Arabia's demands for the exclusion from the Dhahran airbase of American servicemen of the Jewish faith, even though it has been a rigid principle of American foreign policy in the past that foreign countries should not be allowed to make discriminations between different categories of American citizens which are unknown to American law itself.

Nations must be their own judge of what *Realpolitik* demands and it is not for foreigners to lecture them on the subject. But of course this "anti-colonial" emphasis in current policy is more than an application of *Realpolitik*: it is presented and accepted as a natural extension of fundamental American principles; and it antedates not only the most recent phase in the cold war, but the cold war itself. Even the non-American historian is therefore entitled to examine this claim and to suggest some of its consequences.

IT is platitudinous to remark that a struggle for independence from foreign rule is the key event in the United States' own history, as American citizens are taught it, and that in consequence a sympathy with other peoples struggling for freedom is natural to them. The simple fact that the former Indian national movement took the name of "Congress" was a powerful factor in winning American support for its aims.

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But it would be a mistake to imagine that from the days of George Washington to those of John Foster Dulles, American support for subject peoples has followed an unswerving line. There is the old story of the British lecturer in America in the 1920's or 30's who got tired of the repeated interjection from his audiences: "What about the Indians?" and shot back: "Which Indians does the questioner refer to—those whom his ancestors massacred and dispossessed, or those whom we are peacefully leading toward self-government?" And behind this rather bitter quip lies an important clue to the whole question.

For if Americans have certainly attributed great significance to struggles for political independence, they have been equally moved by the romance of settlement. Next to the heroes of the Revolutionary War and the makers of the new nation, and only just next to them, come the heroes of frontier settlement. Davy Crockett treads hard on the heels of Thomas Jefferson. And indeed, the settlement of new lands—whether in America or Siberia—is one of the great epic themes of modern history. But this continental settlement has in both cases been carried on largely at the expense of scattered and primitive peoples whom the conquerors have not turned into colonial subjects, but swept aside, on the whole, unconcernedly—at least until very recently. The strict logic of self-determination would have required that the Red Indians be permitted to keep the North American continent the largely empty and uncultivated wilderness, suited to their own primitive state, that it was when Jamestown was founded. But no Americans have seriously pushed logic so far; Manifest Destiny may have had its victims, but the less said about them the better. Americans have not therefore been opposed to the principle of the expansion of the white Western nations by colonies of settlement; they have only been concerned to see that these colonies should in time achieve their political emancipation from their mother-countries.

Consider for instance, the American at-

titude toward Zionism. It has from the beginning been marked by a sympathy arising from the New World's traditional commitment to the positive values of pioneering settlement, rather than by solicitude for the rights of the native Arab population. Despite the fact that ultimately—as many of the wisest Zionists have always seen (and Weizmann's own autobiography is eloquent on the point)—Israel's main political problem is that of her relations to her Arab milieu, American support for the Jewish National Home and subsequently for the State of Israel was never accompanied by any positive policy on Arab-Jewish relations. It was not that the Americans could not agree on the solution to the problem presented by a multi-racial Palestine, it was that they largely ignored the existence of the problem altogether, except for a limited number of Arab-oriented specialists who went to the other extreme and regarded the Jews purely as colonialist interlopers. For most Americans, the Arabs were, like the Red Indians, not a part of the story. And more recently the adoption by the Eisenhower administration of a pro-Arab point of view has simply meant passing from one oversimplified version of the circumstances to another, under the dictates of considerations extraneous to the problem itself—with the result that Israel remains as vulnerable as ever and that the Arab refugees continue to vegetate in penurious and dangerous idleness.

The Palestine case is one reminder, if the most vivid one, of the fact that apart from North America, Siberia, and Australia, the settlement of relatively empty vastnesses by white immigrants has been an exceptional, and not a normal, development and that an ideology drawn from such experiences is likely to prove irrelevant over much of the rest of the world.

MOST of today's colonial and ex-colonial territories fall into one of three categories which "anti-colonialist" theory does not always sufficiently distinguish. There are, first, the colonies of settlement where the indigenous population was not swept

aside but brought into some kind of relation with the immigrant groups, but where the latter, being a minority, insisted upon institutions designed to safeguard their own supremacy. South Africa, parts of Central and East Africa, as well as Algeria fall into this category. This kind of settlement represents the most acute problem of all for the colonial powers. If they accept the colony's demand for autonomy, it will lead almost inevitably, at first, to the rule of the white minority—as in South Africa. Since the white minority will be trying to keep a position of privilege—justified on material or cultural grounds—that runs counter to the predominant trends of world sentiment, it is likely to end up by espousing a rigidly racist ideology. The South African Dutch—whom the great majority of Americans sympathized with during the Boer War—have developed independently most of the apologies for racial oppression and Negro servitude which were familiar in the American South in the ante-bellum period. There is no Calhounian extravagance that Strydom would not be prepared to repeat. Yet the example of the American South would seem to indicate that mere criticism from outside is unlikely to contribute much to the resolution of one of the most difficult of all political problems—that of the “plural society.”

If on the other hand the mother country does what England tried to do to some extent, if not for the same reasons, in the American colonies before the Revolution—to protect the indigenous inhabitants against the pressure of the settlers—it can only do so by checking the full progress of the colony toward autonomy: that is, by denying to its sons abroad the political liberties they would enjoy at home. The American anti-colonialist has thus either to advocate self-government and allow the more powerful (generally minority) groups in the colony to establish their rule, or to deny self-government in the interests of the majority. The only way out is to suggest that universal suffrage should accompany the grant of self-government—which means asking the imperial government to face the odium of

an experiment on the lines of the post-Civil War Reconstruction in the United States. Is this really possible? Would Americans accept it for themselves? Nothing in their record suggests that they would.

SECONDLY, there are the territories which became part of European empires not for purposes of settlement, but because the process of economic expansion necessitated political control as well, in order to give commerce and industry the protection which the indigenous authorities were unable to supply. This kind of imperialism is symptomatic of the social weaknesses of the conquered rather than of the special greed of the conquerors. Such forms of empire are the most vulnerable under modern conditions but present the easiest problem in some ways. The imperial government needs only to withdraw and leave the field clear for local independence. This is what has happened in the case of the British in India, the French in Indo-China, and the Dutch in Indonesia. It is happening at this moment in West Africa and Malaya, where the British are abdicating their control.

But the relative success achieved in countries like India should not blind us to the real difficulties in the way of the simple withdrawal of the colonial authority. Under present conditions, the newly enfranchised state must be able to set up the full apparatus of modern government. But for this it needs an adequately trained elite; and the existence of this depends in turn, at least in part, upon the previous duration of imperial rule. Thus to hasten the process may make it impossible of achievement, except at the price of self-government turning out to mean either native tyranny or native anarchy. The fact that the United States can offer one good example in the Philippines of how this operation can be brought off does not prove that circumstances are everywhere as favorable. Furthermore, the lack of racial and social homogeneity obtaining in many of the countries concerned may not be due to settlement by immigrants from the ex-imperial power, but to other

movements of peoples either before or during the period of imperial rule. American political thinking offers no solution to the problems of government which this situation poses and which an independent Malaya with its Chinese and Indians will now have to face. And there is also the complication caused by the existence of Communist pressure which the indigenous regimes may be unable to resist without external aid. From the American point of view, there is all the difference in the world between the kind of assistance the United States is giving to South Korea or Southern Vietnam and the colonial rule exercised by the old imperial powers; but for the Asian peoples themselves, the differences may be less obvious. The suspicion with which the Eisenhower Doctrine has been greeted cannot be set down wholly to the efficacy of Soviet propaganda.

Finally, there are places on the map, acquired as strategic bases or commercial *entrepôts* for the furtherance of the imperial country's own commerce, but usually to the benefit of everyone, in which great cities may have sprung up, as in the case of Hong Kong or Singapore, where nothing at all existed previously. President Roosevelt's pressure on the British government in wartime to "retrocede" Hong Kong to China took account neither of the fact that, apart from the rock on which it stands, Hong Kong was not and never had been Chinese, nor of the probable preference of its inhabitants, nor of the services to trade it could render as part of the British maritime empire but only very doubtfully under the kind of regimes that China had so far shown itself capable of developing.

THESE distinctions between forms of colonial rule may seem banal; but the record of American anti-colonialism, especially under Franklin Roosevelt, suggests that they cannot be stated too often or too simply. For the American pressure was not solely exercised against this or that aspect of British imperial rule, but against the whole concept of special ties existing be-

tween Britain and overseas countries, even when, as in the case of the then self-governing dominions, they were almost wholly economic. The sentimental anti-colonialism of a Roosevelt (upon the limitations of whose knowledge in the field a rather alarming light is cast by Mrs. Roosevelt's memoirs) was reinforced by the more doctrinaire conceptions of Cordell Hull.

On matters such as India's progress toward self-government, the difference between Britain and the United States was one of timing only; but on the development of a Commonwealth of Nations whose members would be at different stages on the road to ultimate independence and who would be linked by economic and other arrangements entered into for mutual benefit, the disagreement involved matters of principle. For the Americans, the future of the world lay in its division into a number of entirely separate political units connected by the universalist machinery of the United Nations and its associated organizations, but without any special groupings. The effect of this on the commercial and financial negotiations of the war and postwar periods has been traced in Richard N. Gardner's remarkable work, *Sterling-Dollar Diplomacy*; but its political repercussions are also of importance and are not yet exhausted.

It is a curious testimony to the extent to which unanalyzed prejudices swayed American thinking that it should have been possible for the United States before and during the war to ignore the fact that all the forms of colonialism described above were practiced or envisaged by the Russians without exciting at that time anything like the same measure of American reprobation. Indeed, it was possible for Roosevelt to imagine that he could secure a measure of understanding with Stalin, on the basis of a common anti-colonialism, which he could not hope for with Churchill. Russia had, as we have seen, her colonies of "pure settlement" in Siberia; but in Central Asia she had acquired a whole empire based on various kinds of settlement but all of it enjoying less autonomy than all but the

most backward of Crown colonies. The purely formal incorporation of these vast areas into the Soviet Union's quasi-federal system seemed sufficient to cleanse her of the taint of imperialism despite the fact that her empire was subject to economic planning of a wholly centralized kind, and despite the fact that an alien culture and ideology was forcibly imposed upon its component peoples. It was only when Russia showed signs, in her claims against China, of wanting to go over to strategic imperialism as well—to make a Russian Hong Kong and Singapore out of Port Arthur and Dairen—that American suspicions were finally aroused. One need not press the point against Roosevelt too far; similar illusions were held in some quarters in Britain. But the whole story provides an apt illustration of the inherent confusion of American thought on the anti-colonialist side.

Britain was not, in fact, the chief sufferer from American anti-colonial pressure, since on the whole she was able at the end of the war to resume her program for the peaceful development of the Commonwealth. It is rather in American policy toward Indo-China and Indonesia that we should have to look for the practical consequences of the anti-colonialism of the period.

The United States would seem unconsciously to have adopted the Leninist classification of the non-white world into colonial and semi-colonial countries—the latter being those dominated by foreign capital though preserving the forms of political autonomy. Toward the latter countries, Americans have shown a wholehearted and unequivocal sympathy, provided they were non-Communist. It has been assumed that such countries, if furnished a certain amount of external aid, could develop direct from the more primitive forms of political organization inherited from their own past into states on the Western model, with no intervening period of foreign tutelage. The same assumption has more recently colored United States attitudes toward the Middle East, and is indeed at the very heart of the Eisenhower Doctrine.

THIS American attitude rests, of course, on two unverified and improbable assumptions: first, that Asian and African countries are capable of passing by themselves from one stage of political and administrative development to another without falling into chaos or under some despotism denying full play to the country's human and material resources; and second, that in no circumstances can self-determination lead to the adoption of a Communist system and hence to dependence upon the established Communist powers. Neither of these assumptions is any truer of semi-colonial than of ex-colonial countries. American anti-colonialism assumes that a capacity for creating an ordered and peaceful society is within the grasp of any people no matter what its stage of economic and social development, instead of accepting the far more compelling evidence that goes to show that the free institutions of the Western world are the sophisticated products of a series of historical developments of a unique kind. Nor does the order of priorities in the development of political and social institutions that commends itself to Americans or Western Europeans necessarily appeal to people living under very different conditions.

Again one is unjust if one suggests that no Americans can see beyond the preconceptions induced by their own good fortune. Indeed, the best statement of the intellectual and moral problems involved is probably David Potter's, in his book *People of Plenty*, significantly subtitled "Economic Abundance and the American Character." What other peoples admire and envy in America is not her democratic order but her material abundance; and it has yet to be proved to them that the former has contributed to the latter. Until they have been shown the connection they may very well be inclined to feel—and without the persuasion of Russian or Chinese bayonets—that Communism can lead them direct to the abundance. And where colonialism has been given no chance (or has not taken its chance) to produce an elite differently minded, this is a quite likely event.

But one finds the final confusion of illusion and reality in the support given by the United States to the United Nations—not in the grave affairs of foreign policy to which we have alluded at the beginning of this essay, but on colonial questions in the Trusteeship Council or the Fourth Committee of the General Assembly. Sir Alan Burns, for ten years the permanent British representative on these bodies, has shown in his book, *In Defence of Colonies*, the futility of expecting useful criticism of the work of an administering power to come either from countries serving the political ends of the Soviet bloc, or from countries committed to anti-colonialism but without real experience of the problems posed by the government of backward peoples. There is something fantastic about talking of the beneficent effects of "world public opinion" when what is meant is speeches highly critical of the British, French, or Australian record by the representative of some "banana republic" that has scarcely made a start toward solving its own problems of poverty and illiteracy. But for the anti-colonialist, the peoples of the "banana republics" are free, and those under the protection of a "colonial" power enslaved.

I do not mean to give the impression that there is a ready-made, tested doctrine of beneficent and active imperial rule to oppose to American anti-colonialism. On the contrary, there are fundamental differences in outlook among the remaining imperial powers and within their own people, and their views have undergone more than one change. It should be easy for Britain to understand the American attitude because she too passed through an important phase of anti-colonialism in the first half of the 19th century. The arguments then used appealed principally to British self-interest. Experience had proved that trade was as profitable with countries which were not politically controlled as with colonies; and the latter involved burdens in the shape of the costs of administration and defense which thrifty middle-class radicals saw no

need to shoulder, particularly since the jobs so created normally fell to the aristocracy and gentry. Where continued control seemed unavoidable, as in India, the position of the metropolitan country should, they thought, be used in order to promote Europeanization, since only civilized countries—by which was meant countries like 19th-century Western Europe—could ever usefully rule themselves.

By the late 19th century, a more positive conception of empire had developed and one that has yet perhaps to find its historian. In part, it undoubtedly reflected a rethinking of commercial policy in the light of increased competition, growing protectionism, and a fiercer struggle for markets. But in part, too, it involved an ideology of paternal service to the less fortunate peoples. And gradually the two have merged in the present century into the notion of an evolving, and perhaps even expanding, commonwealth of free peoples. Yet the radical anti-colonial tradition has never vanished altogether and anti-colonialist preaching from outside continues to be sympathetically received within Britain.

The great American argument on the subject, at the turn of the century when the question of expansion outside the areas of continental settlement first had to be faced, was thus conducted in terms that were not so remote after all from British experience. The expansionism of the 1840's had not presented the issue in this way because the inhabitants of the conquered Mexican territory and of Oregon could be assimilated into the American system without raising any question as to the preservation or modification of the United States' cultural homogeneity upon which its institutions have always implicitly rested. The island possessions of Spain raised different questions, as Howard K. Beale has recently reminded us in his important book, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Rise of America to World Power*.

Quotation illustrates the sentiments of the time better than analysis: "The tendency of modern times is towards consolidation. . . . Small states are of the past and

have no future. . . . The great nations are rapidly absorbing for their future expansion and their present defence all the waste places of the earth. It is a movement which makes for civilization and the advancement of the race." Not the English imperialist Joseph Chamberlain but the American Henry Cabot Lodge. . . .

Indeed, the British example was sometimes explicitly avowed. Thus Senator Albert J. Beveridge:

American factories are making more than the American people can use; American soil is producing more than they consume. Fate has written our policy for us; the trade of the world must and shall be ours. And we will get it as our mother has told us how. We will establish trading posts throughout the world as distributing posts for our American products. We will cover the ocean with our merchant marine. We will build a navy to the measure of our greatness. Great colonies governing themselves, flying our flag and trading with us, will grow about our posts of trade. Our institutions will follow our flag on the wings of commerce. And America: American order, American civilization and the American flag, will plant themselves on shores hitherto bloody and benighted, but by those agencies of God henceforth to be made beautiful.

The counter-arguments were not however principally concerned with the effect of territorial acquisition upon the indigenous populations. It was far more a question of whether such action was in accordance with the spirit of America's republican institutions. Thus Carl Schurz who, half a century later, could still talk the language of 1848 and 1861:

I believe that this Republic . . . can endure so long as it remains true to the principles upon which it was founded, but that it will morally decay if it abandons them. I believe this democracy, the government of, by, and for the people, is not fitted for a colonial policy which means conquest by force, or as President McKinley called it, "criminal aggression" and arbitrary rule over subject populations. I believe that, if it attempts such a policy on a large scale, its inevitable degeneracy will hurt the progress of civilization more than it can possibly further that progress by planting its flag upon foreign soil on which its fundamental principles of government cannot live.

And again on another occasion, Schurz tried to prove that colonial acquisitions would not only involve America in the burden of defending them and help to provide the occasions for new wars, but would also fail to reap the expected benefit of gratitude for the favors American rule might confer—and this to an American was clearly an extremely important consideration, as it still is:

We may flatter ourselves that, as conquerors, we are animated with purposes much more unselfish, and we may wonder why not only in the Philippines, but even among the people of Puerto Rico and of Cuba, our benevolent intentions should meet with so much sullen disfavor. The reason is simple. We bring to those populations the intended benefits in the shape of foreign rule: and of all inflictions foreign rule is to them the most odious, as under similar circumstances it would be to us.

The conclusion of the argument was stated by William Jennings Bryan when, in his speech accepting the Democratic nomination in 1900, he argued against the retention of the Philippines:

Whether the Spanish war shall be known in history as a war for liberty or as a war of conquest, whether the principles of self-government shall be strengthened or abandoned; whether this nation shall remain a homogeneous republic or become a heterogeneous empire—these questions must be answered by the American people—when they speak, and not until then, will destiny be revealed.

The upshot was paradoxical. The United States, having acquired the embryo of an empire, then set to work getting rid of it; so that the Schurzes and the Bryans now appear to have triumphed. It is worth noting that what exceptions there have been to the American retreat from empire have been justified not on economic but on military grounds—not on any grounds connected with the territories themselves, but simply because these territories have been thought necessary to the defense of the continental United States. The acquisitions in the Pacific made at the end of the Second World War were exclusively of this kind.

THE Marxist analysis of imperialism, which has had an impact well outside Marxist circles, was based on the assumption that a developing capitalism would need foreign markets to absorb its surpluses, and that its struggle to obtain such markets or outlets for investment would drive it along the imperialist road. Recent developments in the economic policies of capitalist countries, influenced by Keynesian economic thought, have taken some of the force from this argument. But if these earlier economic arguments, adduced to suggest the inevitability of all capitalist states, including the United States, adopting imperialist policies, are no longer persuasive, serious economic issues remain that cannot so lightly be dismissed.

An important characteristic of all advanced economies today is their increasing dependence upon a regular and guaranteed supply of raw materials and sources of energy—oil and uranium—from areas abroad. To this the American economy has hitherto presented something of an exception, because of the great variety of its own continental endowments. But there is reason to believe that this is ceasing to be the case. It is unlikely, then, that the United States will always be able to rely on purely commercial transactions for acquiring some of the materials she vitally needs. This is partly so because there may be regimes which, for political reasons, will want to deny them to her or use their control of them for political blackmail. America's fear of Communist expansion is justified on this ground alone,

quite apart from ideological considerations.

But it is also the case that not every country in the world is able to mount unaided the economic effort necessary to exploit its own economic resources, and that the social transformation necessary to enable it to do so may crack its traditional structure of authority. The United States will then learn—and may in the Middle East and elsewhere already be learning—the hard truth that great nations cannot necessarily choose whether they will be “colonialist” or not. The important thing is that Americans should come to understand the difference between doing the “colonial” job properly and doing it badly—and certainly they will not learn this lesson by indiscriminately abusing those countries which are already confronted with responsibilities of this kind, and by accepting at face value the propaganda of every Asian and African nationalist movement.

The problem of the world today is not so much its ideological as its material divisions; the United States belongs with the rich and not with the poor, and can get nowhere with an ideology proper to the latter group of countries. Since it will not accept demotion into the ranks of the poor, it has to spend part of its substance on elevating them into the ranks of the rich before it is overwhelmed in a flood of envy and hate. Its destiny, then, is no different from that of other Western nations—the occasional self-righteousness of its leaders to the contrary notwithstanding.